

DON FEDER

It's nature vs. nurture in gay debate

Dear Abby may be the ultimate cultural chameleon, blending perfectly with the background of her times. If the culture says the naked emperor is well-dressed, Abby admires his elegant ensemble.

Her response to a plea from a homosexual who's anything but gay proved once again that she is a slave to social fashion.

"I'll get right to the point," Unhappy writes. "I am gay, but I don't like being gay. . . . Abby, adjusting to homosexuality is fine for those who have accepted their homosexuality, but I have not. I know I'd be happier straight. Please help me."

Abby's support consists of skepticism and platitudes. "Did you choose to be homosexual? If so, you could choose to be straight. But if you have always had erotic feelings for men instead of women, then face it, you are a homosexual. . . . To thine own self be true. Only then will you find true happiness." Sounds like a Hallmark card from Act-Up.

The culture decrees that homosexuality is biologic — inborn, immutable. To this, Abby vigorously assents. From the popular media, she has ingested whole the orientation argument.

Three media-touted studies have asserted a genetic basis for homosexuality. All were flawed. All were the work of homosexual researchers eager to prove a point.

The latest, released in July, was the work of Dr. Dean Hamer, a geneticist with the National Institutes of Health. Hamer claims to have found the same genetic markers on the X chromosome of 31 of 40 pairs of homosexual brothers. "Gay gene," the headlines screamed.

A few problems arise: 1) The sampling was too small. 2) What about the nine sets of gay brothers who didn't have the marker? 3) There was no control group, no way of knowing if heterosexuals also have the markers.

The Hamer study replicated errors in earlier efforts. Neurobiologist Simon LeVay examined the brains of 41 cadavers. He studied a tiny area of the hypothalamus (INAH-3) believed to influence sexual behavior. Of 19 homosexuals in the group, 16 had a smaller than normal INAH-3. Ergo: Little INAH-3 equals homosexual.

Reports on the amazing breakthrough failed to note that this region is smaller than a grain of sand and has no distinct boundaries, making measurements imprecise. Based on medical records, LeVay assumed that 22 of his subjects were heterosexual, though all had died of AIDS.

Then there was the Bailey-Pillard study of homosexuals and their brothers, which found that if one of a pair of identical twins was homosexual, there was a 52 percent chance the other would be. But twins tend to be raised in very similar environments. Is it nature or nurture?

After a thorough examination of the two earlier studies, Drs. William Byne and Bruce Parsons of Columbia University conclude: "There is no evidence at present to substantiate a biologic theory" of homosexuality.

If you've always been attracted to members of your sex, you're a homosexual, now and forevermore, writes Abby. "Most male homosexuals will tell you that their first erotic feelings were for men," says Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, whose knowledge comes not from the popular press but personal experience.

Nicolosi, a clinical psychologist who has treated over 250 homosexuals in 15 years of practice, believes homosexuality is "a treatable developmental disorder."

Though his views are disdained by a profession in the throes of political correctness, Nicolosi says the condition arises primarily from a son's failure to identify with his father. If the father is absent, emotionally detached, weak or brutal, the son responds defensively by withdrawing.

During adolescence, this failure to bond has consequences. "Men remain mysterious, and the young man is sexually attracted to yet fearful of men — bound into a same-sex ambivalence. This same-sex ambivalence has much to do with the characteristic unfaithfulness in male homosexual relationships."

Homosexual activists respond that gays who seek treatment have internalized homophobia. Those who claim to be cured have repressed their natures and are living a lie, they charge. Nicolosi replies that his patients "achieve enlightenment. People who go through therapy successfully experience a transformation in their feelings, not a suppression."

Nicolosi's judgment is supported by the testimony of thousands of former homosexuals. One of them, Alan Medinger, who now heads an outreach ministry, led a homosexual life for 17 years.

Abby rhetorically asks her reader if he chose to be homosexual. Medinger observes that no one "chooses" to be homosexual — but (and this is crucial) with help, one can choose not to be.

Feder is a columnist for the Boston Herald.

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